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ABSTRACT

A theory proposed in explanation and prediction of a concept of social style--an individual's distinctive pattern of communication behavior as perceived by others--was tested in an exploratory study. The two dimensions of social style (assertiveness and responsiveness) served as criterion variables for the study. The major goal of the research was to determine the theoretical impact of the context of a relationship upon the perception of social style. Thirteen dimensions of person perception were hypothesized to be predictive of social style in such a manner that the predictive models would be unique for each of three contexts of primary relationships: acquaintances, friends, and coworkers. These variables, along with the criterion variables of assertiveness and responsiveness, were operationalized and included in a questionnaire packet which 164 "target" individuals were asked to distribute to three others: an acquaintance, a friend, and a coworker. A total of 109 acquaintances, 105 friends, and 106 coworkers comprised the usable subject population. Data collected from these subjects were supportive of a contextual view of social style in primary relationships. Four laws of interaction and 21 propositions (which are presented in the paper) were developed in support of the theory. (Author/GT)

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# A CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF SOCIAL STYLE IN PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

by

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# A CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF SOCIAL STYLE IN PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH


## ABSTRACT

The study proposed a theory in explanation and prediction of a two-dimensional concept called social style. This concept involved the determination of an individual's distinctive pattern of communication behavior as perceived by others. The two dimensions of social style (assertiveness and responsiveness) served as criterion variables for the study. The major goal of the research was to determine the theoretical impact of the context of the relationship upon the perception of social style.

Given a premise that interpersonal perceptions of another's behavior are essential components of the interpersonal relationship, a set of thirteen dimensions of person perception were hypothesized to be predictive of social style in such a manner that the predictive models would be unique for each of three contexts of primary relationships: acquaintances, friends & co-workers. These variables, along with the criterion variables of assertiveness and responsiveness, were operationalized and included in a questionnaire packet which 164 "target" individuals were asked to distribute to three others: an acquaintance, a friend, and a co-worker.

A total of 105 friends, 106 co-workers, and 109 acquaintances comprised the usable subject populations. Data collected from these subjects were submitted to a series of multiple regression analyses to test the hypotheses. The results were supportive of a contextual view of social style in primary relationships. Given an inductive-deductive framework, three laws of interaction and 21 propositions were developed in support of the theory.



Paper presented at the Interpersonal Communication Division of the International Communication Association, Chicago convention, 1978.

# A CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF SOCIAL STYLE IN PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

In their search for ways in which people may better manage their interpersonal relationships, a number of researchers and practitioners have recently begun to develop a concept called "social style." The goal of this research has been to find a simple but effective way in which to describe another's behavior and then to react appropriately in a communication relationship. It has been suggested that through the identification of two major dimensions of communication behavior (assertiveness and responsiveness) it may be possible for individuals to quickly and accurately describe and adapt to the behavior of others with the goal of increased understanding and improved communication relationships.

While some research has been conducted to verify the validity and impact of social style, the central concepts and related beliefs about social style have yet to be theoretically developed. The purpose of this project was to begin that development, utilizing a combination of inductive and deductive approaches (Dubin, 1969). While the relative merits of an entirely inductive (or deductive) approach may be debated, it is apparent that theory building must begin somewhere. Thus, following Dubin's approach, reasonable statements have been constructed on the basis of the best available observations, philosophies, and empirical results.

## Person Perception

Communication researchers have long been concerned with the role of person perception in interpersonal relationships (e.g. credibility, attraction, similarity, etc.). Prior to their widespread use in this field, person perceptions were also considered fundamental to the field of social psychology (e.f. Tagiuri & Petrullo, 1958). Argyle (1969), Insko and Schlopler (1972), and others have argued for the importance of person perception to our understanding of human interactions. Specifically, they argued that people will inevitably make person perceptions, and such perceptions will influence the interpersonal relationships to a significant degree.

Because interpersonal perceptions have been found to form the basis for interpersonal interaction and because such perceptions allow the communication researcher to more clearly understand and predict interpersonal behavior (Hastorf, Richardson, & Dornbusch, 1958), it is essential that they be considered in a theory of communication behavior. Thus, the following premise was advanced:

**Premise I:** Interpersonal perception of another's behavior is an essential component of the interpersonal relationship.

Given this premise, it is important to discover a system which relies upon perceptions and can be useful in the understanding, prediction, and control of interpersonal relationships. The following section proposed such a system, referred to as "social style."

## Social Style

A number of scholars and practitioners have identified the concept of behavioral style (Buchholz, Lashbrook & Wenburg, 1976; Mehrabian, 1971; Merrill, 1973; Miller, 1976; Norton, 1974; Norton and Pettegrew, 1976). In most cases, style refers to other-perceived patterns of interpersonal behavior which others in a relationship can perceive in describing a person.

Aside from "leadership style" (Blake & Mouton, 1964; McGregor, 1960; Reddin, 1970), at least two style systems have emerged in recent research: "communicator style" (Norton, 1974) and "social style". When compared to other systems, social style has a few advantages. First, instead of a multitude of dimensions, social style identifies only two. This is more useful since the practitioner and student can more easily conceptualize style. Secondly, social style is applicable to a wide variety of relationships and situations. As a result of these conclusions, the following premise of the theory was proposed:

> Premise II: "Social style" is a useful means for classifying communication behavior.

While research in many areas have provided a number of labels for the primary dimensions of human behavior, it appears that two dimensions are communicated to others: assertiveness and responsiveness (Borgatta, 1960; Borgatta, Cottrell & Mann, 1958; Buchholz, et al., 1976; Mehrabian, 1971; Merrill, 1973). Conceptually, someone who appears to express emotional states through verbal and non-verbal behavior would be termed responsive; one who does not would be termed non-responsive. A person who appears aggressive, argumentative, and competitive would be termed assertive rather than non-assertive. Both dimensions can be conceptualized as consisting of a continuum from one extreme to the other. It is thus possible to posit the final premise of social style theory:

> Premise III: Social style can be conceptualized in terms of assertiveness and responsiveness.

## Context

One of the most quoted statements about the effect of the context upon human communication behavior was that of Bateson (1972) who concluded that "without context there is no communication" (p. 408). That is, in order to study communication behavior, it is essential to consider the situation in which the behavior takes place (Duffy, 1941; Goffman, 1959; 1969; 1973; Mehrabian, 1968; Rausch, Barry, Hertel & Swain, 1974). Individuals are not

closed systems, and thus must be examined in terms of the outside influences which affect them.

A number of researchers have found that the context of a relationship will affect communication behavior in significant ways (c.f. Bateson, 1972). Bochner (1976) concluded from his review of family communication literature that "the more we learn about the rule-conforming nature of communication phenomena, the more we recognize the importance of context. No meaning-centered theory of communication could possibly be written without reference to context" (p. 381). Finally, Nimmo (1974) suggested that context is determined by the type of relationships. The following section suggests a system of contexts based upon types of relationships.

## Conceptualizing Context

While some studies to determine contexts have been conducted (c.f. Wish, 1976), these attempts have, for the most part, failed to provide a comprehensive, operational system of context. However, Garrison, Sullivan & Pate (1976) and Garrison & Powell (1977) identified four important contexts: acquaintances, friends, co-workers & family members. While the first three contexts are representative of types of primary relationships, the family context may have been too broad, ignoring basic contextual differences within the overall constraint of the family (e.g. spouse relationships, sibling relationships, parent-child & extended family). It may be more useful to consider contexts within macro categories such as primary relationships and family relationships.

One final approach to defining context was that of Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and Secord and Backman (1974) in their discussion of social exchange theory. Like Duck (1973), these authors conceptualized context in terms of the passing of relationships through a series of stages (sampling, bargaining, committment & institutionalization). These stages are useful in understanding the contextual system employed in this study. The system was a modification of the Garrison, et al. (1976) system, restrictive to primary social relationships and was suggestive of three contexts: acquaintances, friends, and co-workers.

The acquaintance context. Several authors have identified and examined a unique communication context composed of "acquaintances" (Brenton, 1974; McCall, 1970). Acquaintanceship is defined as the existence of mutual recognition of the other as a distinctive individual, sufficient to constrain them to interact. Garrison, et. al. (1976) defined this context as primarily involving the exchange of demographic information.

In terms of social exchange theory, acquaintances would be considered to fall within the bargaining stage. That is, acquaintances attempt to determine whether a more involved relationship (friendship) would be to their mutual advantage. According to the social exchange paradigm, when individuals move to the commitment state, they have become friends.

Given the premise of this theory that person perceptions are essential

components of the relationship, the review of literature in each context has sought to discover some of the key perceptual dimensions for each context. Among acquaintances, three variables appeared to be especially operative: attitude similarity, background similarity and social attraction. While there has been little empirical research conducted within this context, these variables were identified conceptually by Swensen (1973) and Duck (1973). One recent empirical study (Snavely, Merker, Becker & Book, 1976) examined the acquaintance context and found that both social attraction (liking) and background similarity were important.

The friendship context. A number of studies have examined the context of friendship. Friends have been defined in terms of the voluntary nature of the relationship (as opposed to co-workers) and high degrees of intimacy and resulting trust, self-disclosure, and affection as distinguishing features of friendships.

In terms of social exchange theory, friendships involve the commitment stage of a relationship. This stage is characterized by intimacy and a mutual commitment to the maintenance of the relationship. Additionally, this context would involve predictions of one another on the basis of highly individualized, psychological information (Miller & Steinberg, 1975).

The dimensions of person perception identified by the literature as most important to this context were interpersonal trust, social attraction and value similarity. Perhaps in large part because of the intimate level of this context, the perception of trust is of prime importance to most friendships (Brenton, 1974; Davis, 1973; Luft, 1969). It has become almost axiomatic that friendship is based upon mutual bonds of attraction. In terms of the dimensions of attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974), social attraction seems the most appropriate for this context (c.f. Garrison, et al., 1976). Finally, value similarity (as opposed to the background or attitude dimensions) would be of prime importance to the friendship context (Brenton, 1974; Lockwood & Eman, 1976).

The co-worker context. Co-workers can be defined as those individuals with whom one works in an organization. The organizational setting has been found to provide unique constraints, goals, and role demands upon relationships within them. An abundance of research and theory conducted under the rubrics of organizational behavior and organizational communication have attested to the uniqueness of this context in such terms.

In addition to several personality and environmental variables (e.g. cohesion, rewards, satisfaction, motivation, etc.), several dimensions of person perception have been identified as important to this context. They include perceptions of trust, power, task attraction, credibility, and versatility.

While interpersonal trust has been shown to be essential to friendship relationships, it appears to be equally important in the co-worker context (DiSalvo, Monroe & Morse, 1977; Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975; Redding, 1973).

Perceptions of interpersonal power may be equally important to co-worker relationships (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schein, 1977). Additionally, the literature suggests that perceptions of credibility (DiSalvo, et al., 1977; Redding, 1973), task attraction (Garrison, et al., 1976; McCroskey & McCain, 1974), and versatility (Katz & Kahn, 1966) play important roles in co-worker relationships.

The review of contextual literature makes it clear that individuals behave differently depending upon the context of the relationship between them. The preceding reviews have established the viability of three contexts of primary relationships: acquaintances, friends, and co-workers. It appears that certain dimensions of person perception may exert differential influences depending upon the context of the relationship. As a result of these concerns the following proposition, central to the theory of social style, was advanced:

> Proposition I: The perceived social style for an individual is unique to the interpersonal context within which a relationship exists.

A full development of this theory and an adequate test of the preceding proposition requires an examination of the perceptual variables established as important in the various contexts. The remaining propositions are generated on the basis of links between these variables and social style.

## Interpersonal Attraction

A number of summaries of the literature have noted that attraction tends to be a significant predictor of leadership, interpersonal influence, and amount of communication in a relationship (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; McCroskey, Larson & Knapp, 1971; McGuire, 1969). Lashbrook (1975) found the task dimension of attraction to be predictive of group leadership. Each of these findings suggest a link between attraction and assertiveness.

Both Parsely and Lashbrook (1976) and Norton and Pettegrew (1976) found that relationships could be drawn between the two dimensions of style (or their analogue) and attraction. Importantly, the former study concluded that the context of the relationship might have some impact on this relationship. Finally, Sullivan (1977) found social attraction to be predictive of combinations of assertiveness and responsiveness.

As a result of these findings, the following proposition was advanced. Attraction is assumed to involve two dimensions (task and social). There is no reason to predict a relationship between physical attraction and social style.

> Proposition II: Interpersonal attraction is related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

Interpersonal Credibility

While little research has been conducted to link credibility to social style, some literature is suggestive of such a link. Sullivan (1977) found two dimensions of credibility (extroversion and sociability) to be significant predictors of combinations of assertiveness and responsiveness. Other research has been less direct in implications.

Credibility has been examined as a factor in the exposure to, comprehension of, and recall of information (Wheeless, 1974a; 1974b). To the extent that the receiver's information processing is influenced by credibility perceptions, it is likely that the processing of assertiveness and responsiveness may also be affected.

An additional line of research has examined the relationship between credibility and the ability to exercise influence (Anderson & Clevenger, 1963; Lashbrook, 1971; McGuire, 1969). Remembering that assertiveness is defined in terms of the ability to state opinions with force, a tie to credibility seems apparent. Thus, the following proposition was advanced:

Proposition III: Interpersonal credibility is related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

Interpersonal Power

While perceptions of interpersonal power have received limited attention in the literature (c.f. Garrison, et al., 1976; Mowday, 1977), there is reason to suggest that power may be related to social style. Clary and Luke (1977) proposed that people perceived as powerful behave in predictable fashion, one method of which would be a direct, assertive, "competitive" style of behavior. Mowday (1976) identified at least two assertive behaviors (threats and persuasive arguments). While the link to responsiveness was much weaker, Mowday found the giving of rewards to be an effective, responsive power behavior. Finally, Sullivan (1977) found power to be a discriminator of social style in co-worker relationships. Thus, the following proposition was advanced (given the modification suggested by the first proposition):

Proposition IV: Perceptions of interpersonal power are related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

Interpersonal Similarity

The relationship between perceptions of similarity and communication behavior has long been established (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954; Rogers & Bhomick, 1970; Wheeless, 1974b). To the extent that these behaviors can be perceived and social style is representative of communication behavior, it is likely that similarity is related to social style. McCroskey, Richmond and Daly (1975) found that opinion leaders (who are likely to be more assertive) were perceived as more similar than non-leaders on three dimensions of similarity: attitude, value and background. Thus, the following proposition was advanced:

Proposition V: Perceptions of interpersonal similarity are related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

Interpersonal Trust

A number of recent investigations have recently found a relationship to exist between perceptions of trust and perceptions of social style (c.f. Sullivan, 1977). Lashbrook, et al. (1976b) conducted a survey study of 949 adult subjects in which regression analyses confirmed the hypothesis that both versatility and trust would significantly predict social style. Given the modification of contextual impact (Proposition I) the following proposition was advanced:

Proposition VI: Interpersonal trust is related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

Interpersonal Versatility

As noted above, Lashbrook and his associates found versatility to be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness. Conceptually,

versatile individuals are those who are perceived by others as being flexible and adaptable to other individuals and a variety of situations. Research to date suggests that versatility is related to social style (Buchholz, et al., 1976; Lashbrook, et al., 1976a; 1976b). Given the contextual modification, the following proposition was advanced:

Proposition VII: Interpersonal versatility is related to assertiveness and responsiveness.

These seven propositions form the conceptual basis for a contextual theory of social style. While at this point the propositions are rather broad, the specific nature of the multivariate relationships among the perceptual variables and the dimensions of social style can be determined through the testing of the following hypotheses. The inductive/deductive approach then calls for a re-specification of the theory to account for the results of the testing of these hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The predictive models of assertiveness and responsiveness will vary across the acquaintance, friend and co-worker contexts of primary relationships.

The test of this hypothesis was made via comparison of an overall predictive regression model with each of the contextual models. The following hypotheses were constrained by the assumption of this hypothesis that the obtained models would vary across context. The review of literature and the rationales which led to propositions II through VII suggested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, the dimensions of interpersonal attraction will be significant predictors of assertiveness and responsiveness.

2a: Social Attraction will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

2b: Task Attraction will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

Hypothesis 3: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, the dimensions of interpersonal credibility will be significant predictors of assertiveness and responsiveness.

3a: Competence will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

3b: Composure will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

3c: Character will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

3d: Extroversion will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

3e: Sociability will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

Hypothesis 4: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, interpersonal power will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

Hypothesis 5: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, the dimensions of interpersonal similarity will be significant predictors of assertiveness and responsiveness.

5a: Attitude Similarity will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

5b: Value Similarity will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

5c: Background Similarity will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

Hypothesis 6: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, interpersonal trust will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

Hypothesis 7: When placed in a regression model with other dimensions of person perception, interpersonal versatility will be a significant predictor of assertiveness and responsiveness.

## METHOD

A total of 162 "target" individuals from three institutions of higher education were contacted, and each was asked to have three people fill out the questionnaire for the study. In order to provide for the various contexts, targets were asked to choose one friend, one acquaintance, and one co-worker. These subjects were then asked to return the completed forms to the researcher. Of 415 forms returned, there were 105 friends, 109 acquaintances and 106 co-workers. The remainder of the questionnaires were not usable for data analysis.

The relationships between the predictor (person perceptions) and criterion (assertiveness and responsiveness) variables were examined first regardless of context, and then examined separately within context. All variables were operationalized and contained in one questionnaire packet. The data were then entered into regression analyses in order to test the hypotheses. The following sections explicate these procedures.

### Operational Measures

Interval-level scale items were used for all criterion and predictor variables in the study. In each case, scales were chosen which represented the best available measurement of the given variable. Figure 1 lists the source for the scales and the published reliabilities for each scale. Since some of the scales varied (e.g. Likert-type, semantic differential, checklist), the data were standardized prior to statistical analysis to eliminate any possible scaling effects (Finn, 1974; Bock, 1975).

### Procedures

The questionnaire was composed of the previously mentioned scales as well as the following details. A cover letter to targets accompanied the three packets and included an explanation of the project, a discussion of context and short definitions of acquaintance, friend, and co-worker. The latter information provided some measure of consistency and reliability in context manipulation.

Subject packets were prefaced with a cover letter similar to that given the targets which explained the nature of the study, assured subjects of confidentiality and instructed them to answer all items carefully. Secondly, the packet included the same context definitions, followed by a manipulation item which asked subjects to indicate the context of their relationship with the target. Following demographic questions were the scale items themselves.

A total of 95 subjects were eliminated from the analysis. Twenty-six were eliminated since two or more subjects for a given target indicated the same context. Eight subjects indicated contexts other than the three primary

Figure 1

Sources for Scales

| DIMENSION | RELIABILITIES | SOURCE OF SCALES |
|---|---|---|
| Assertiveness | .89 | Buchholz, et al., (1976)/Lashbrook, et al. (1976a) |
| Responsiveness | .86 | |
| Versatility | .80 | |
| Trust | .88 | |
| Power | NA | Lashbrook (1974) |
| Task Attraction | .85 | McCroskey & McCain (1974) |
| Social Attraction | .84 | |
| Extroversion | .63 | McCroskey, Jensen & Valencia (1973) |
| Sociability | .70 | |
| Character | .71 | |
| Composure | .65 | |
| Competence | .67 | |
| Attitude Similarity | .86* | McCroskey, Richmond & Daly (1975) |
| Value Similarity | .61* | |
| Background Similarity | .70* | |

*Snavely, et al. (1976)

contexts of this study and six provided no context information. Two subjects were eliminated because their forms were completed incorrectly and the remainder were eliminated due to missing data.

## Statistical Analysis

The tests of the hypotheses were made by means of multiple regression analysis (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973). An overall predictive model was first derived on the basis of the data from all contexts combined. This model was then applied to the data within each context. The overall $R^2$ was then compared to the contextual $R^2$ for each analysis. Support for the first hypothesis was contingent upon a significant difference between these results for at least some of the analyses. The alpha level for all tests was set a priori at .05.

The tests of significance for the remainder of the hypotheses were made by computation of the $F$ value for changes in $R^2$ (Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973). In order to maximize the efficiency of the model, the final predictors which did not contribute significantly to the variance of the criterion were eliminated and the regression was re-estimated to obtain the best estimates for only the leading predictors (Finn, 1974).

In order to account for projected shrinkage, Tatsuoka's (1969) formula for an adjusted $R^2$ was computed for each contextual analysis. Hays' (1973) formula for the precise determination of variance accounted for was also computed for each contextual analysis. Finally, Kirk's (1968) formulas for statistical power were computed for each analysis.

# RESULTS

## Preliminary Analyses

The first step in the analysis of the data was to compute the obtained scale reliabilities for each variable by means of Cronbach's alpha (Table 1). As a rule of thumb, it was determined that scales must show a reliability of at least .60 to be included in the analysis. Based on this requirement, social attraction ($r$= .566) was eliminated from further data analysis.

As a further test of data stability, McGary and Burns' (1974) method of computing Wolin's index of single-factoredness was computed for each predictor and criterion variable. Any factor which received an index score of .75 or greater was considered to be a stable factor. An analysis of Table 1 indicates that social attraction was not found to be a stable factor in this study (W=.3694).

As a check for multicollinearity (c.f. Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973), intercorrelations among the predictors were computed prior to the analysis (Table 2). It was determined that multicollinearity would be found with $r$ values greater than .70. On this basis, no multicollinearity was observed. Finally, the statistical power for each analysis exceeded .99.

Table 1

Overall
ATSCALE Results

| VARIABLE | WOLINS | CRONBACH'S ALPHA |
|---|---|---|
| ASSERTIVENESS | .9508 | .867 |
| RESPONSIVENESS | .9715 | .877 |
| VERSATILITY | .9790 | .866' |
| TRUST | .9881 | .956 |
| EXTROVERSION | .9650 | .852 |
| SOCIABILITY | .9516 | .779 |
| CHARACTER | .9676 | .837 |
| COMPOSURE | .8954 | .730 |
| COMPETENCE | .9926 | .824 |
| POWER | .9982 | .719 |
| ATTITUDE SIMILARITY | .9889 | .862 |
| VALUE SIMILARITY | .9682 | .639 |
| BACKGROUND SIMILARITY | .9832 | .751 |
| TASK ATTRACTION | .9551 | .694 |
| SOCIAL ATTRACTION[1] | .3694 | .566 |

[1]Below acceptable levels

Table 2

Intercorrelations Among Predictors

| | VERS | TRUS | POWR | EXTR | SOCI | CHAR | CMSR | CMPC | ASIM | VSIM | BSIM | TASK | SOAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VERS | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| TRUS | .61 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| POWR | .29 | .09 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| EXTR | .14 | -.07 | .49 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| SOCI | .35 | .17 | .39 | .28 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| CHAR | .29 | .38 | .32 | -.02 | .65 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| CMSR | .29 | .04 | .18 | -.04 | .35 | .27 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| CMPC | .33 | .28 | .61 | .20 | .44 | .57 | .32 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - |
| ASIM | .19 | .19 | .32 | .11 | .28 | .27 | .17 | .31 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - |
| VSIM | .20 | .19 | .34 | .07 | .36 | .42 | .19 | .37 | .59 | 1.00 | - | - | - |
| BSIM | .07 | .07 | .27 | .13 | .13 | .18 | .05 | .17 | .41 | .42 | 1.00 | - | - |
| TASK | .28 | .36 | .29 | .10 | .24 | .39 | .11 | .42 | .32 | .33 | .23 | 1.00 | - |
| SOAT | .19 | .20 | .30 | .18 | .35 | .33 | .02 | .25 | .39 | .41 | .26 | .49 | 1.00 |

Hypotheses

The results of the $R^2$ statistic for eac analysis have been included in Table 3. They indicated that each model provided high predictability of social style. The computation of Tatsuoka's $R^2$ indicated that little shrinkage should be expected in future analyses. Additionally, the Hays $R^2$ demonstrated that the obtained models were capable of explaining a great deal of the variance in social style.

Hypothesis 1 suggested that the predictive models of assertiveness and responsiveness would vary across the three contexts studied. The data from this study provided support for this prediction. The overall model (Table 4) was applied to each context. Of the six $R^2$ comparisons made, the context models were significantly better than the overall model in three cases (Table 3). Since some of the contextual models were forced to be similar to the overall model, this finding lent support to the first hypothesis.

Addititionally, for both assertiveness (Table 5) and responsiveness (Table 6) the predictive models for each context provided a unique set of predictors. Some predictors (e.g. trust and extroversion) were significant regardless of context while others (e.g. character, task attraction, value similarity) were contextually bound.

An examination of the results of the contextual models reveals that the predictive power of all but four variables (competence, social attraction, attitude similarity, and background similarity) was demonstrated by the data in at least partial support of hypotheses two through seven. The following section has taken these results into consideration in the re-formulation of social style theory.

## DISCUSSION

Following Dubin's (1969) approach to theory building, the following laws of interaction and propositions have been suggested as a result of the present investigation. (A law of interaction is merely the expression of the likely relationship among units of the theory; it is not "fact"). The first law of interaction is representative of the heart of this theory. Established in the review of literature as the first proposition, this statement is basic to an understanding of the study's results and subsequent theory building.

Law of Interaction I: The perceived social style for an individual is unique to the interpersonal context within which a relationship exists.

The findings in support of hypothesis 1 lend support to this position. It appears that within primary relationships there are at least three contexts: acquaintances, friends, and co-workers. The three laws of interaction which follow and their associated propositions are concerned with the specific nature of these contextual differences.

Table 3

Regression Results and Contextual Comparisons

| CONTEXT | N | CRITERION | CONTEXT $R^2$ | # PRED. | OVERALL $R^2$ | # PRED. | F | TATSUOKA $R^2$ | HAYS $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACQUAINTANCE | 109 | ASSERT | .5056 | 4 | .5118 | 5 | 1.319 | .487 | .499 |
| | | RESPON | .6371 | 4 | .6419 | 6 | 0.706 | .623 | .632 |
| FRIENDSHIP | 105 | ASSERT | .5783 | 6 | .5659 | 5 | 2.882a | .552 | .572 |
| | | RESPON | .7114 | 5 | .6932 | 6 | 6.276a | .697 | .707 |
| CO-WORKER | 106 | ASSERT | .6808 | 6 | .6714 | 5 | 2.947a | .661 | .676 |
| | | RESPON | .7767 | 5 | .7783 | 6 | 0.727 | .766 | .773 |

[a]Significant at the a priori alpha level of .05

Table 4

Overall Regression Model[1]

| | ASSERTIVENESS | | RESPONSIVENESS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PREDICTOR VARIABLE | BETA | F | BETA | F |
| VERSATILITY | .1576 | 10.411 | .4652 | 114.559 |
| TRUST | .2528 | 26.289 | .2779 | 44.805 |
| EXTROVERSION | .4099 | 89.053 | .1494 | 19.403 |
| POWER | .3560 | 58.694 | --- | --- |
| CHARACTER | -.3257 | 58.989 | --- | --- |
| SOCIABILITY | --- | --- | .3707 | 98.230 |
| COMPETENCE | --- | --- | -.1093 | 8.851 |
| COMPOSURE | --- | --- | -.0790 | 4.896 |

[1]All reported F values were significant at the a priori alpha level of .05.

Table 5

Assertiveness Predictor Variable Results[1]

| | ACQUAINTANCE | | FRIENDSHIP | | CO-WORKER | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PREDICTOR VARIABLES | BETA | F | BETA | F | BETA | F |
| EXTROVERSION | .3473 | 16.789 | .4293 | 30.168 | .4725 | 47.835 |
| POWER | .4421 | 22.427 | .3693 | 19.939 | .3248 | 20.608 |
| CHARACTER | -.3463 | 13.247 | -.3116 | 17.290 | -.2302 | 13.376 |
| TRUST | .2281 | 6.936 | .3599 | 17.962 | .1636 | 3.929 |
| VERSATILITY | --- | --- | .1624 | 3.908 | .2514 | 8.914 |
| VALUE SIMILARITY | --- | --- | .1190 | 2.884 | --- | --- |
| COMPOSURE | --- | --- | --- | --- | -.1071 | 2.920 |

Table 6

Responsiveness Predictor Variable Results[1]

| | ACQUAINTANCE | | FRIENDSHIP | | CO-WORKER | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PREDICTOR VARIABLES | BETA | F | BETA | F | BETA | F |
| SOCIABILITY | .3554 | 23.055 | .5539 | 43.910 | .3386 | 42.487 |
| VERSATILITY | .2169 | 6.549 | .4019 | 31.902 | .5050 | 57.615 |
| TRUST | .2990 | 15.856 | .3415 | 22.104 | .3245 | 24.102 |
| EXTROVERSION | .2195 | 12.350 | .1481 | 6.203 | .1153 | 5.381 |
| CHARACTER | --- | --- | -.3026 | 14.450 | --- | --- |
| TASK ATTRACTION | --- | --- | --- | --- | -.1329 | 6.639 |

[1]All reported F values were significant at the a priori alpha level of .05.

Law of Interaction II: Dimensions of person perception will be predictive of social style in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 1: Perceived extroversion is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 2: Perceived trust is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 3: Perceived character is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 4: Perceived power is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 5: Perceived sociability is related to perceptions of responsiveness in the acquaintance context.

Proposition 6: Perceived versatility is related to perceptions of responsiveness in the acquaintance context.

The three variables which emerged in the literature review as important to this context (attitude and background similarity; social attraction) were not supported by these results. However, the search for rewards inherent in the bargaining process would explain the power of the trust and social attraction variables. While the findings are supportive in general of the literature linking the variables to style, some of the findings are particularly noteworthy.

The negative beta weights across context for character suggests that perceptions of character may detract from perceptions of assertiveness. It would not seem appropriate to view any style as primarily "good" or "bad" from these results. The finding that versatility was not predictive of assertiveness and was a weak predictor of responsiveness suggests that versatility may have more impact in more permanent relationships such as co-workers and friends.

Law of Interaction III: Dimensions of person perception will be predictive of social style in the friendship context.

Proposition 7: Perceived character is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the friendship context.

Proposition 8: Perceived extroversion is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the friendship context.

Proposition 9: Perceived trust is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the friendship context.

Proposition 10: Perceived versatility is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the friendship context.

Proposition 11: Perceived value similarity is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the friendship context.

Proposition 12: Perceived power is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the friend- context.

Proposition 13: Perceived sociability is related to perceptions of responsiveness in the friendship context.

The review of the friendship context suggested that at least three perceptions would be important (trust, value similarity & social attraction). While data instability prevented the latter variable from being considered in this study, both trust and value similarity were significant predictors. Again, while many of the findings are supportive of the previously mentioned literature, a few of the findings deserve special mention.

Since friendships involve the commitment stage of a relationship, it follows that rewards would be highest for those relationships in which there was a consonance of basic values. Proposition 11 reflects this contextual difference in support of Brenton (1974). Additionally, it was found that character was predictive of responsiveness only for friends. The negative beta weight suggests a negative relationship between character and responsiveness. It may be that over-disclosure of emotions may be perceived by friends as a burden and thus an undesirable character trait.

Law of Interaction IV: Dimensions of person perception will be predictive of social style in the co-worker context.

Proposition 14: Perceived extroversion is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 15: Perceived trust is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 16: Perceived versatility is related to perceptions of assertiveness and responsiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 17: Perceived composure is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 18: Perceived character is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 19: Perceived power is related to perceptions of assertiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 20: Perceived sociability is related to perceptions of responsiveness in the co-worker context.

Proposition 21: Perceived task attraction is related to perceptions of responsiveness in the co-worker context.

The variables found to be especially important to this context in the review of literature were perceptions of trust, power, task attraction, credibility and versatility. The propositions are supportive of each of these relationships. The following findings are noteworthy.

The finding that composure (proposition 17) was a significant predictor of assertiveness among co-workers illustrated another contextual difference. The relationship is reasonable since composure represents the degree to which a person is perceived to be excitable or relaxed. The negative beta weight suggests the excitable person is seen as more assertive. Concern with one another's composure may be a function of the work environment. Again, assertiveness is not always associated with positive perceptions.

Finally, proposition 21 posited that task attraction was a predictor of responsiveness in the co-worker context. This finding is important since it was not observed in other, more social contexts. The negative beta weight suggests that workers may prefer to work with those individuals who control their emotions. Such a conclusion would be consistent with the characterization of the work environment as primary task-oriented.

In each context, the beta weights can be combined in order to construct a predictive functional equation for the prediction of social style. It should be noted, however, that additional research should be conducted before the functional relationships can be stabilized.

Overall, these findings and the resultant theory suggest that communication researchers ought to consider the context of the relationship and person

perceptions in theory formulations. Additionally, the instability of social attraction raises some questions. Examination of the items reveals that the scales may be measuring friendship instead of attraction. In this case, variance would be extremely limited once contexts were separated, perhaps contributing to instability. In any case, future researchers may want to devise a new measure and enter this variable into the model before social attraction is dismissed from the theory.

Future research (beyond replication) may profitably extend the theory in terms of consequences of style, other contexts, and/or other perceptual variables. Logical extensions from the laws and propositions are also possible. Clearly, extensions in non-verbal research are called for to identify specific behaviors associated with dimensions of style. Finally, other methodologies might also be employed to answer research questions arising from this study and the resulting theory. For example, a case study might be useful in generating new theoretical units and in observing contextual changes in style. Stability within context might be examined through a time-series design. And a path analysis methodology might be useful in order to further explicate the nature of the relationship among the variables of this theory. It may be found that some of the perceptual variables have more indirect effects, while other variables have direct effects.

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